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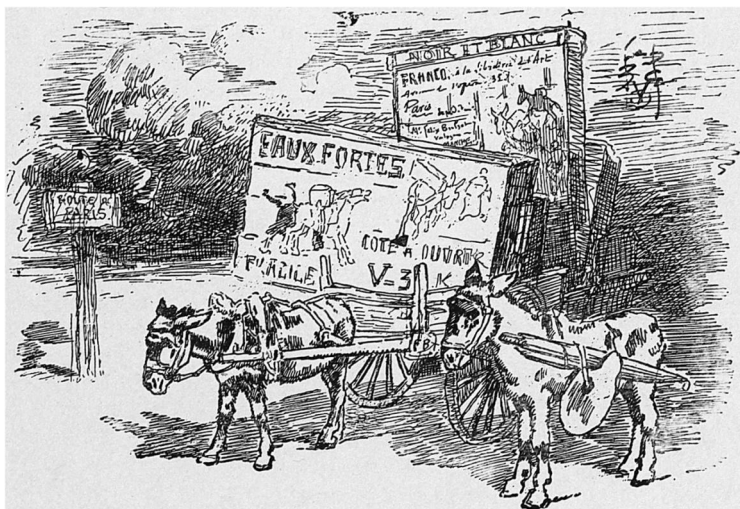
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FROM A DRAWING BY FELIX BUHOT.

## FELIX BUHOT, ETCHER.

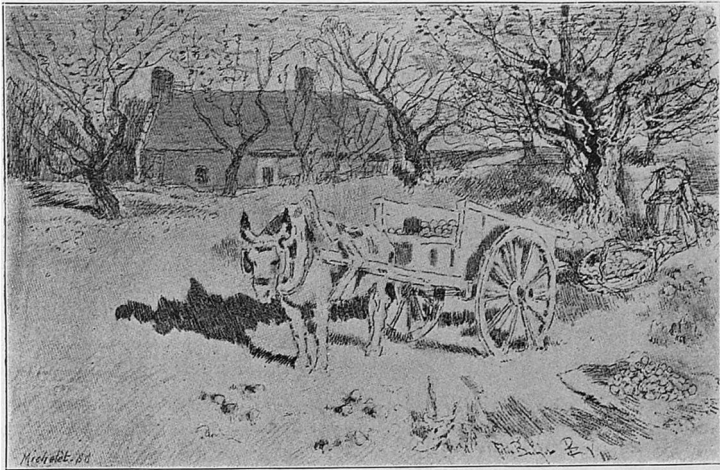
MOST lovers of modern etchings are acquainted with the names of F. Seymour Haden, J. MacNeill Whistler, possibly James Tissot, but it is to be doubted if they are as familiar with the name of Felix Buhot, whom such critics as Octave Uzanne and Philippe Burty place in the same honorable list. The death of this gifted French artist of the needle a few months ago in Paris, warrants the publication of a word or two of biography and critical mention, with a few characteristic illustrations. Some of his larger and more important plates are too delicate to be reproduced by such processes as are here employed, but enough can be seen to give the reader some idea of his merit and the character of his art.

Much of the beauty of etching is in the charm of line and quality of paper, which is wholly lost in a reproduction. It is this charm that gives etching its value, and by which personal characteristics are so sympathetically transmitted. Of all reproductive processes, this of etching is at once the most personal and the most artistic. We appreciate in a good

impression the nervous activity, the life and artistic heat of the soul behind the bitten line.

It is not a secondhanded transmission — each printed etching is almost a unique original. An artist has conceived it, has etched it directly, and has printed it with loving care and a technical knowledge at his command sufficient to make the lifeless paper breathe with all the vigor and freshness of his first mental vision. It is this personal quality that gives the value to etchings, and which increases the more it is understood.

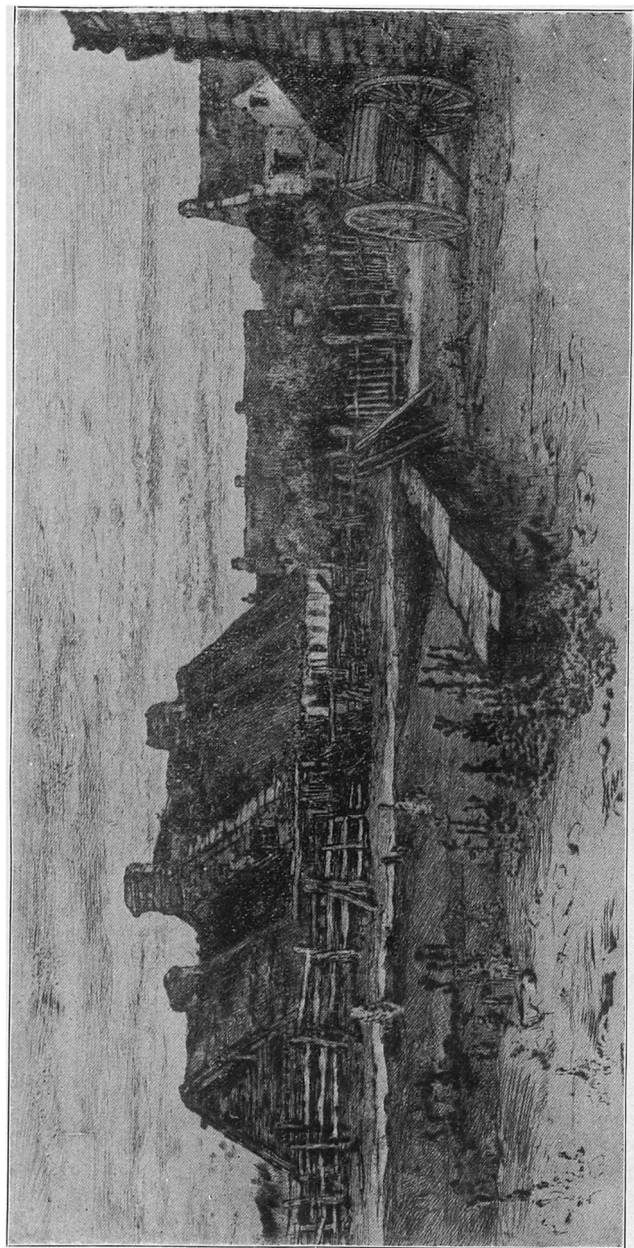
Felix Buhot was born in the little Norman village of Valonges, about fifty years ago. He attended school and received a degree of Bachelor of



SKETCH FOR THE "SÉRIE DES ANES," BY FELIX BUHOT.

From the Brochure by Octave Uzanne.

Letters at Caen, in 1865. Arriving in Paris the same year, after some private art study, he entered the École des Beaux Arts and the atelier of Pils, and afterward with the marine painter, Jules Noël. Without means, he was forced into the industrial arts, like so many others, and essayed lithography, and made designs for music titles. The war came on, and he enlisted, retiring with the rank of sergeant-major. Soon after he accepted a position in the College Rollin, where he taught drawing in such a thoroughly unconventional way that he was soon invited to retire. His method was to use a blackboard and draw any object at hand, after-



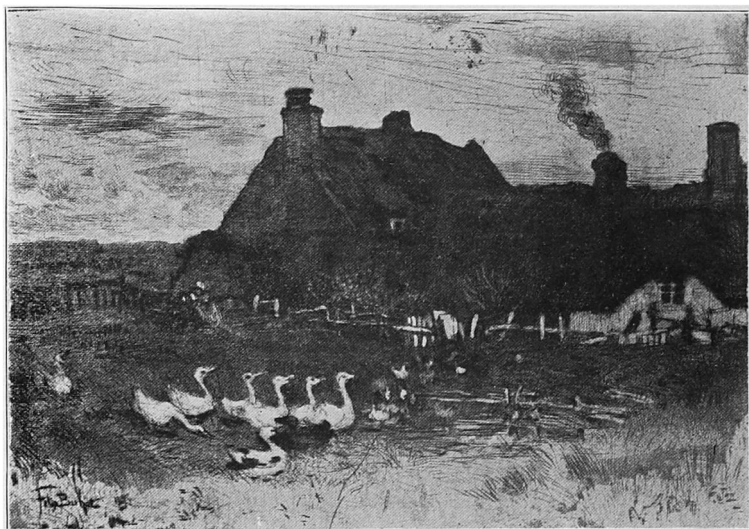
FROM AN ARTIST'S PROOF ETCHING  
BY FELIX BUHOT

Courtesy of Albert Roullier

ward the same object from memory. This failure discouraged any further activity in teaching, and he decided to earn his right to live with his pencil and etching point.

His early plates were signed "Tohub," a reversal of his real name, which he soon discontinued. It was at this time that he reproduced in etching some rare Japanese vases with fine appreciation.

He was soon in command of his materials, and began experimenting with papers, which developed into a sort of mania. One can hardly find



A CHARACTERISTIC PLATE BY FELIX BUHOT.

Courtesy of Albert Roullier.

two impressions of the same plate on the same paper. From the first he pulled his own impressions, and destroyed everyone that did not reproduce the full qualities of his plate. For subjects his list includes a large range: Landscapes, marines, animals, street scenes, architecture, and illustrations of all kinds. He is well known for the thorough study he gave the donkey, and many of his plates are given over to this patient beast. Through a number of his rural scenes white geese make decorative procession.

A characteristic of some of his largest and perhaps most important plates, notably his fine etching of Westminster Bridge, is the mass of scenes that

surround the principal one like a border. It offers a sort of transitional tone from the dark plate to the white mount and frame, and is very interesting itself, being made up of snap shots, so to speak, of things going on while the plate was being engraved — passersby, stray dogs, playing infants, numberless things that a big city offers to a wandering and imaginative eye.

During one period of his career in Paris he seems to have been haunted by funereal scenes. For ten years his sketch books are full of mortuary processions, hearses, mourners, wreaths and trappings of death. Many



BEFORE THE CHURCH, BY FELIX BUHOT.

of his landscapes and his beach scenes with shipping have, however, none of this morbid tendency, and seem very frank, healthy and direct. He was very versatile and chose a manner of technic which best fitted the motive in hand. But in his printing, as has been intimated, he was most particular. In his search for papers of all sorts of surfaces, weights and tint, he became an expert and made a list of over eight hundred marks of ancient makers. He knew every little shop in Paris and intended to publish a book of his experiences, to be called "A Voyage to the Country of Old Papers." These are his own words, freely translated, concerning the

great care with which he chose his papers and prepared them for his impressions. "I try to supply myself, so far as possible, for my artist proofs, with old papers, looking carefully for the varieties of pulps and tints. But what I search for always and before everything is the intimate affinity in grain, rough or tender, in tone and character, with the character of the plate to be printed." In 1870, he printed twelve plates to illustrate the above, using all sorts of paper, even in one case common wrapping stuff. Later he experimented by immersing his paper in essence of turpentine, with this result: "As to the manner of preparation, it is something as follows: It is necessary that the paper be imbibed with turpentine enough so there may be no need of further moistening. It is important, then, just before taking the proof to dry it a little, not too much, between other sheets, which thus become impregnated and ready for an impression; otherwise, the proofs would be too black and muddy. The proof thus taken cleans the plate. These are not the only results one obtains. The papers, when they are of good quality and carefully chosen, acquire by their sojourn in the turpentine a beautiful tone like parchment, which brings to the proof a certain harmony. They acquire also the consistency of parchment. Moreover, there is a last advantage which has its price: The proofs taken with turpentine are free from the destruction by animal life."

Buhot was an indefatigable sketcher, and illustrated a number of works by different French writers, but it is as an etcher that we are concerned. Mr. Frederick Keppel, of New York, was the means of introducing him to America, and Buhot's studio on the boulevard Clichy, when he was preparing for this important exhibition, was literally filled with impressions, drawings, sketch books, portfolios, loose scraps, frames and boxes, which showed his enormous fecundity and unending industry. It was the record of an artist's life about to be opened to the curious gaze of an American public.

This exhibition was in 1888 in New York, and included some 249 numbers. It met with marked success, both in awakening artistic interest and financially. (The catalogue was prefaced with an appreciative letter from Philippe Burty, the eminent art critic and friend.)

Octave Uzanne, in his able critique, gives this summary of the artistic qualities of this gifted etcher: "Buhot," he says, "is a visionary, one obsessed by the picturesqueness of modern life; nervous to excess, tortured by a crowd of fleeting impressions and queer ideas, he suffered from a cruel inability to reproduce them as he wished." He adds this, which gives us a more generous idea of his talents: "Buhot lived out his own personality. He is modern to a degree, and leaves nothing for the clear-sighted amateur to add to. His beautiful prints will sell some day like

Rembrandt's, for he executed them with care, as well as fooled with them, and he arranged them with a joy such as no one can ever have a complete idea."

In Henri Beraldi's "Graveurs du XIX Siècle," there is a well described list of 162 works by Buhot. The complete number of his plates is about 190. An appreciative paper on Buhot by Philippe Burty appeared in *Harper's Magazine* for February, 1888, and there is a brochure on him by Octave Uzanne (Paris, Maison Quantin, 1888), from which frequent quotations have been made in this article.



AN EARLY ETCHING BY FELIX BUHOT, SHOWING THE TOHUB SIGNATURE.